

*Theology vol. 12*

AN  
ADDRESS  
TO THE  
GENTLEMEN

Who are deputed from the  
several Congregations of PROTE-  
STANT DISSENTERS, to attend  
the Report of the Committee relating  
to the Repeal of the  
CORPORATION and TEST-ACTS.

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*To every thing there is a SEASON, and a TIME to every  
purpose under Heaven, Eccles. iii. 1.  
And a wise man's heart discerneth both TIME and  
JUDGMENT, chap. viii. 5.*

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L O N D O N :

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# A N ADDRESS, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

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the affair relating to the *Repeal* of  
the Corporation and Test-Acts is now  
intrusted, by the general consent of  
the Protestant Dissenters, in your  
hands; and as the hopes and expectations  
which have been raised not only by a majority  
in this city, at the last general Meeting in *Sil-*  
*ver-street*, but throughout *England*, will stand  
or fall according to your resolutions; it will not, I  
hope, be reckoned unreasonable for one of your  
brethren who is then to be represented, to offer  
some considerations to you on such an occasion.

To begin then where Religion it self obliges  
me; be perswaded to reflect seriously on the  
*Nature of the thing*, and the great *Importance*  
of that which you are engaged in. If it was a  
matter of indifference, if the cause and honour of



Christianity was not at all concerned in it; then there might be some colour for an excuse, either to decline it, or to be indolent and inactive in it. But when it only aims at the asserting Christ's sole authority, as Governour and Law-giver of his Church; when it is a delivering one of his sacred institutions from that which has made it the scorn and banter of infidels; and the confining it to that for which he, *as the Author and Finisher of our faith* only instituted and designed it; when it is a restoring to every man a liberty of conscience, and the removing a burden which has been groaned under by every upright man from generation to generation; and the *continuance* of which can never, (by all the craft of priests, nor all the artifice and depths of politicks, be demonstrated to be of any real *advantage*) when *this* is what you are called upon to consider and attempt the removal of, what in all the world is more just and reasonable? what more worthy your warmest zeal, than the honour of your common Lord, the credit of his Holy Religion, and the freeing the souls of men from dangerous snares and intanglements? This thought is enough to put life and spirit into all your resolutions; to engage you to act worthy the *name* you bear, and the obligations your divine religion lays upon you. And how will you be able, comfortably to answer it at the great day, if you let slip such an opportunity, which your Master puts into your hands, for bringing about so great, so glorious, so honourable a cause?



I address you, Gentlemen, as Dissenters upon *Principle*; upon a *Principle* which has stood against the attacks of artful *Reasoning* on the one hand; and where *that* has fail'd, of *Persecution* on the other; and yet a Principle superior to both: and in this View you will not reckon me to talk *out of character*, by applying to you in so *serious* a manner.

—I know very well that our enemies, and those who are almost as bad, our *flattering friends*, imagine, and confidently give out, that all the stir that is made about the repealing these Laws, arises only from a vain *ambition* of grasping all the great places of trust and profit to ourselves. But this ought not to be charg'd on the Dissenters, till it can be made good; as I never yet heard of any who were govern'd only by such a motive, so the charge may be esteemed as *false* as it is trifling and ridiculous. For let it be consider'd, the repeal of these Laws puts no men *actually* into places of *trust* and *profit*; but only *capacitates* them for service when the wisdom of the government thinks fit to *require* their service; as it often does. Now is it not unreasonable, that Protestant Dissenters should often be *call'd* upon, without any *seeking of their own*, to serve their country in such stations (as *Sheriffs of the countys*, or the like,) as must oblige them either to violate their consciences, or expose themselves to the loss of great part of their estates? — Is it not most absurd, and *un- generous* to the last degree, that those men  
who

who are acknowledg'd by the present illustrious Royal Family, and by some of the chief *ministers of state*, to be friends, steddy and hearty friends to the government, should be incumber'd, and stigmatiz'd with *disqualifying Laws*; when *Tories* of arbitrary slavish principles, principles in their own nature destructive of the present happy constitution, labour under no *incapacitating Tests* to prevent their doing *mischief*?—Nay, is it not the most unaccountable *politicks* in all the world, that Protestant Dissenters should not be upon the level even with *Papists*? These by a dispensation from *Rome* may be empowered to commit transubstantiation, and in a very easy way to get rid of their scruples; and consequently have no clog, no incumbrance: and therefore it may easily be seen, and *known* too from history, that it is not a *Test-Act* that keeps them off; but only a government and ministry intirely averse to their accursed principles. But now Protestant Dissenters have no such relief; tho their principles and practice are most opposite to Popery.

Besides, let it be consider'd, as the *true* state of the case, that it is not receiving the sacrament at the Church of *England* by *way of distinction*, that is what you will think absolutely sinful or unlawful: but the receiving it *at all* for any *other* end, and with any other view, than that for which the Divine Author first instituted it. And therefore the same objection would hold against receiving it at a *meeting* from one of your own ministers, on the



the same account, as from one of the *establisht* church, viz. *the profanation of the ordinance.*—

And I believe that it was from a deep conviction of the scandal this *Test* brings upon the Church, and the force of this way of reasoning, that a reverend B--p moved to shift it off from the Church and throw it upon ourselves and our ministers; for which we shall be for ever obliged to him: but at the same time confess, that, if our case is not to be alter'd otherwise, we had much rather the odium lie where it does; to the eternal honour of him who is such a friend to it. But blessed be God there is no fear matters will be left in so melancholy a situation; if you, Gentlemen, will exert the courage of Men, and the vigour and spirit of Christians on such an occasion. If the case is not as I have represented it let our adversaries show the contrary; but if it is, in God's name let us exert ourselves! *Let us not sleep as do others; but whatever our hand finds to do, do it with all our might.* Again,

Being convinc'd of the *Importance* of the Affair, from thence be persuaded to judge of the *Propriety of the Time* for your attempts, and the objections brought against it. As *Christians*, the *first* time that offers is certainly the *best* for retrieving the honour of a *Divine Institution*, and the obtaining the *Liberty of Conscience* which was made not for Man to govern but God. It is true they *by whom* the offence cometh are the greater sinners, but still those who comply are *guilty* too, and to be easy  
in



in such a compliance, without attempting a deliverance, must argue a *fear of man, which brings a snare*, to be predominant over a reverential fear of the Eternal God: for in this case, whether *we should obey men rather than God, judge ye*. — But then, as members of civil society, there may be *one time more proper* than another.

As for example; when encouragements for such a repeal have been given before, and yet our expectations baulk'd afterwards, and the same opportunity returns. — When you have a Parliament, the *greater* part of which are hearty friends to liberty of conscience; and some of whom have declared their readiness to assist, upon an application. — When the Dissenters themselves are esteem'd by those at the helm to be *most* useful and serviceable, as at the close of a Parliament in prospect of a new election; — when we have no foreign commotions or disturbances to prevent the regular spread of such a desire, nor any *well grounded* reason to fear bad consequences from the enemies of the government at home: if, farther, it is such a time as when the like incumbrances were taken off, and yet the government and ministry too labour'd under greater disadvantages from the fears of foreign and domestick enemies; — if, lastly, there appears a warm and lively spirit thro' the kingdom for such an attempt, — *such* a time must surely be the proper. — And here, I believe, you will be all before-hand with me in applying and  
fixing

fixing these particulars to the present opportunity ; and you have no doubt seen these reasons confirm'd, in the judicious pamphlets that have been wrote on this occasion, especially *that first letter to Mr. Holden*, for which the author (whoever he be) has my hearty thanks. Now from hence you will learn to judge of the *objections against the present* being the proper time. It is said that pushing such an affair at the close of the Parliament will *distress the Government* ; and *prejudice the Dissenters themselves*. But, after all, I have never heard this fairly prov'd ; it is only argu'd from *uncertain guesses and surmises*, which therefore I think are to be reckon'd only as so many *bugbears* to keep you at a due distance ; especially when you now see the plain *English* of all is this, as you have been told in so many words by one who is for taking the *shortest way with the Dissenters*, that *this* is not the proper time, because *no time at all* is proper for such an attempt. Surely, Gentlemen, this is enough to open your eyes, and convince from whence all the cry of the *impropriety* of the time proceeds, and quicken you, for that very reason, to an uncommon vigor *now*, when you see you must despair of success afterwards. For if it has been already asserted that the *Test-Act* is *now* grown part of the constitution ; this can be no argument, for defering an attempt for the repeal of it two or three years longer.—In this case, as well as in others, *Vox Populi* may be esteem'd *Vox Dei* ; the

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majority



majority of the citizens call to you, your friends from all parts of the country call aloud to you, and press earnestly for a deliverance from this hardship, this mark of *infamy*, this notorious grievance. Nay, the *very dust* of your forefathers who have long pray'd and waited for such an *opportunity*, and such a *spirit*, speaks to your most serious thoughts; and will for ever upbraid your negligence if you let the present time slip. And shall nothing move you? Shall your ears be stop'd against all intreaties? and your hearts harden'd against all impressions that the strongest and most powerful motives might make upon you? Are you resolv'd to run contrary to all engagements to your fellow-subjects as *Dissenters*, your families, and your liberty too! Surely it is too late to trust any longer; when you have so often paid for it beforehand!

3. Being persuaded *this* is a *proper time*, and the *only proper*, engage heartily in a vigorous attempt, and trust in God for a happy and successful issue. It is a *common* but just observation; that *duty* is *ours*, but events are *God's*. Does his providence point out to us our duty; and afford a time and season for the performance of it; let us heartily and thankfully embrace it; and hope in *him* for the removal of those *seeming* difficulties that lie in the way.— I know it is said, that these difficulties are *insuperable*, that they will render your attempt vain if you make it; and load you with double uneasiness. But how do your opposers



posers know this? Can you be sure a difficulty is insuperable before you have tried whether it is so or not? Did not greater difficulties attend the repeal of some former acts? Difficulties from *Tory bigots*, and *timorous Whigs*, difficulties from the posture of *national affairs*, from a government just beginning to rise from the ruins of a shattered and distracted state; and yet after all that was said, did not your forefathers obtain their desire? If then they have succeeded under greater and vastly more just discouragements, will you suffer *your hands to hang down*, *your knees to grow feeble*, and your spirits to flag, only upon *imaginary* impediments; which (if you will but allow others to think of consequences as well as yourselves) will soon be remov'd, upon your firm and steady conduct? If your *ancestors* obtain'd redresses under such great disadvantages; *you* must be inexcusable if you don't try for your long expected liberty at a time which seems well calculated for the obtaining it; and when your *very attempt*, will probably go a great way to secure your success. But it may be said, that if we trust in God, we should wait till he *changes the times and seasons* again, and makes every thing easy for us. But if we neglect a *present opportunity* which he puts into our hands, can we then think he will indulge us in our sloth and indolence, and make *other changes* for us? Is there any solid foundation to hope for incouragement from God hereafter, if we are inattentive to the direction of his

kind *providence* now? He may not indeed make every thing that has the *least* appearance of a difficulty vanish at first without your endeavours, because he may, in infinite wisdom, choose to bless and succeed you in the use of those powers and capacities which he has given you; but if he does bless you *in* the use and exercise of them it is sufficient: and whether he will do so or not, you can never know till you have first made the trial.

Are you never to expect to have your *captivity turned back*, but only *when you are as men that dream*?

4. Be persuaded farther to consider, *who* it is you are to represent at your general meeting. You don't appear only for *your selves*, nor are you to report only your own *private opinions*; but you represent the *Whole Body of Dissenters*, in and about this city which is not contemptible; and you are to attend to their *general sense* in the affair. And what *that is* you are too well acquainted with to need any information from me. I have before observ'd, that *the majority* by far, in this city; and the chief part of all the country are unanimous for attempting the repeal this sessions, and I believe, I may safely stand to the assertion; and add farther, that I apprehend there would not have been any against it, if they had not been *cool'd* and *frighten'd* by *those men* who resolv'd at the beginning of the year to push it now, tho' the *M—ry* should *be against it*; who affirm'd that they should not do *justice to posterity*



rity if they did not push for it, at this time; and yet, when the time comes, are as diligent in undermining the affair, as if each was to receive a very large salary for his pains; but without the least sufficient reasons for their conduct; any more than what they heard *last* winter, and which they imagin'd *then* were not strong enough to baulk their attempts now. Look then at things in this light, Gentlemen, which I imagine to be a true one; look on your fellow citizens, and look on the country around you, and then act as the very reason of the *thing*, the consent of your friends, the dictates of your own consciences, and the concern for the next generations shall direct you. Your own *private* opinions and sentiments of the matter, are, no doubt, of weight with you, and are to be mention'd as you shall judge proper; but then they are to be deliver'd only as *your own*, and not made use of to stifle and overbear the *common report* from the several congregations who depute you. It is a great trust that is committed to *your* hands, the eyes of the Church and the world, of the friends and enemies of our cause are fixt upon you; and waiting the important issue. And shall not this alarm you? shall not this enliven your languid zeal, and establish your wavering minds in unshaken resolutions of acting in earnest for your Common Cause; lest otherwise you *betray* your trust, and be among those who would deliver us up to the scorn and contempt of our opposers? And tho you do not represent the distant



distant *countys*; yet when they observe your concurrence with the general opinion of the true unbias'd Dissenters here; they that have been ready and waited for you so long, will gladly join you; and the few others will feel, by degrees, *that water* which has been artfully thrown on them, instead of quenching, only makes their flame burn *purser* and *brighter*, and so diffuse a generous and becoming warmth thro' the whole land.

5. Consider farther, how *mean* and *contemptible* the *Protestant Dissenters* will look, if they should, after all, agree to drop their Petition now. They attempted the last sessions, and then were laid quiet by the prospect of having their desire fulfill'd at this time. Hereupon they have exerted themselves, made a great stir in the nation, waited on *Members of Parliament*, consulted *Ministers of State*; and all this to make them believe they are in earnest in the cause. They have receiv'd such answers as have justly been thought not sufficient to turn off their pursuits; but rather to give them some encouragement; the clergy begin to think they may prevail; and many of them who are serious consciencious men, are to be judg'd friends to the attempt, and wish them success too; the Tories are afraid, and the Politick Whigs are convinc'd, that they have not lost their true *English Spirit*, notwithstanding all attempts to stifle and overcome it. Now in such a situation as this is, what in all the world can you think becoming

ing your resolutions, and conduct? Is it this to give up your attempt at once; to disappoint the hopes of your friends, to lay open your weakness to your enemies, and to render yourselves the laugh of all? If you drop your Petition when you have talk'd in so sanguine a manner about presenting it, and suffer yourselves to be beat back by a shadow, what other judgment will be form'd of you but this, that you are at the best a despicable people, who can talk big but do nothing? and that if you can so easily be amus'd and hush'd once from a state of vigour and zeal to indolence and stupidity, even at *this time*, when you are own'd to be the *most* useful and of the greatest influence (as in the view of a new election) your requests and petitions shall be much sooner rejected afterwards, when your chief influence is over, and your *greatest strength* has appear'd to be only *weakness*. So that the *honour* of the Dissenters here lies at stake too. And is this to be given up for scandal, for contempt, and a mark of everlasting infamy? Your *very attempt*, if you imagine it will *not* succeed (for which I can't see any overbearing reason) will make you appear more *considerable* in the eyes of the world; will discover you to be, not *obstinate, hot-headed enthusiasts*, who are for overturning *Church and State*, (as has been represented by a late mighty writer in a very weak pamphlet) but men of *courage and resolution, of wisdom and understanding*; who have



have not acted but upon the maturest deliberation; and therefore are not to be affrighted as children in a *nursery* by *pretended* plots, and stories without foundation; and by this means your very enemies will have, upon the whole, a better and more manly opinion of you; tho at the same time they may hate your principles and practice. I add farther, that if you should suppose still your petition now would be rejected, yet having *once* presented it, you will be more ready and dispos'd to renew your applications in succeeding years, till you obtain your request; than if you suffer yourselves to be broke to pieces and disconcerted without one strong and lively Effort. In this view then the thing appears to me just and reasonable; and you will not, I hope, say that I am herein persuading you to run your heads against a *post*, as has been groundlessly suggested; for really I don't see any *post* in the way, unless you concur to set it up yourselves! As ever then you would maintain your character; as ever you would appear to the world worthy their notice and regard; as ever you would hope for any success in future time, tho you may at present fail of it; let this exhortation prevail with you to shew *yourselves men*.

6. Lastly; Consider the necessity of preserving peace and harmony among yourselves. Whatever a certain Querist may affirm, the Tories are not the *only* party who have learnt the truth of that maxim, *Divide & Impera*; every



every politician sees the justness of it ; and therefore, when prudence directs him, will, no doubt, labour to shew the power and efficacy of it. And will you chuse to break your own interest to serve that which is against you ? It is indeed a shame that any man who wears the name of a *Protestant Dissenter* should join in with the *Tories*, and endeavour to weaken our hands ; especially when there are so few among us on his side, and the number of hearty friends to the cause increases *daily* ? Let not then any among *us* retail the cant, and amuse us by saying it is only the cause of an *Irish L—d* which we espouse ; and of one who has *betrayed* our Interest before. It is no otherwise the cause of Lord *B—n*, than as he is a *Dissenter* ; it is not his Cause *particularly*, but it is the *Common Cause* of us all ; and we look upon that noble Lord as engag'd with us on this account *only* ; and whatever reflections the Querist may make upon his Lordship's *past conduct*, he had much better be quiet, and not talk of *betraying* our *interest*, lest he should provoke us to tell him *who* have acted as if they would *SELL* it, of their own heads, and without any commission for such kind of *brokerage*. Let all such mean artifices as these, such pretences to be of one party rather than another, drop at once ; and come together with this *one* view, only to pursue, by a vigorous attempt, the *true and real interest* of the Dissenters ; and to this end let those few who have hitherto been against the the repeal *at this*

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*time,*

*time*, readily comply with the far greater part who are of the contrary opinion. Let there be no hard words or unjust censures, no envyings and revilings; which will answer no end, unless it be to divert and entertain those who would be glad of fomenting divisions among you. It is your *unanimity*, Gentlemen, here that is most *dreaded* by your adversaries; and most *desir'd* by your friends: It is this alone that has prosper'd the *Quakers* in their addresses, and makes them still deservedly *fear'd* and *respected* by all. For God's sake then, and your own, don't *you* who are so great a body, and differ from the Establish'd Church for those reasons which many of their wisest divines have thought sufficient, don't you act so inconsistent a part, as to tell the world that tho you agree together to *dissent*, you are of one mind in nothing else; but at continual variance and opposition with each other.

I have now, Gentlemen, finish'd my Address; and as I apprehended there was sufficient foundation for it, I appeal to your own Judgments whether you do not think there is some weight in the *arguments themselves*, what ever there may be in *my way* of enlarging on them. And if there is, excuse the freedom, and suffer them to prevail. What can have a more proper influence on a serious mind, than the *importance of such a petition* to the cause of Christianity itself? What can tend more to quicken such a spirit to *action*,  
than



than those circumstances which concur to  
 render *this season proper for such a petition*?  
 What can give more satisfaction to the mind,  
 as to the *success of it*, than a regular *trust in*  
*that Great Governour among the nations, the*  
*King of Kings and the Lord of Lords?*  
 What can have a greater tendency to excite  
 you to the utmost *diligence, speed and una-*  
*nimity in your petition*, than the *considera-*  
*tion of so many eyes upon you, such great*  
*expectations from you, and the dread of appear-*  
*ing weak, silly and contemptible to all future*  
*ages?* Be not therefore overborn by the per-  
 suasions or influence of any, to warp from your  
 steady purposes in this affair, but be of one  
 heart, and one soul, and press on with  
 a becoming courage; and be not weary in  
 well-doing; and then, no doubt, you will  
 find favour in the eyes of his *most excellent*  
*Majesty*, who chuses to be call'd the *Father of*  
*his people*, because he always shows himself  
 ready to act the part of a *father* to them;  
 and so succeeding generations rise up  
 and call you blessed.

F I N I S.

And all you should  
and to shall succeeding generations tie up  
ready to sacrifice part of a nation to them;  
a people, because he always flows himself  
society. Who chooses to be called the Father of  
and favour in the eyes of his own people  
well doing; and then, no doubt, you will  
becoming common; and do not weary in  
heart, and one soul and place on with  
every purpose in your power, but of the  
allies or influence to warp from your  
goal. Do not then form by the per-  
fect work. My country is to all nations  
Western civilization, and the great object  
of to many our own men, such great  
way is your nation, than the confidence  
on to the utmost diligence, speed and wis-  
dom can have a greater tendency to excite  
king of kings and the Lord of Lords?  
the Great Governor among the nations, and  
to the benefit of all, than a royal war is  
What can give more satisfaction to the mind,  
under this great project for the world?  
than those excellencies which concern to



21 May 1941



What can I do to help you?